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ABSTRACT

This guide is the first in a series of guidelines designed to be a framework for positive action at the school site and in the classroom through the High Schools That Work program, an effort to raise the achievement of career-bound students. It focuses on the first step for superintendents, principals, and vocational leaders: to introduce the whole faculty to a vision of the things the school can do to raise the achievement of career-bound students. This framework involves the following actions: developing an upgraded academic core and a major for all students; having high expectations for all students; providing high quality vocational studies; providing high-level academic studies; creating interdisciplinary teams of teachers; providing ongoing guidance; giving extra help and time; engaging students as active learners; and keeping score to improve practice. These steps are discussed: adopting outcome goals; demonstrating the need for change, including looking at other schools and confronting barriers to change; enlisting parent support; providing staff development and support; accepting change one step at a time; developing an action plan; adopting a problem-solving strategy; rethinking all routines; and affirming district and state support. (YLB)

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SITE DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

#1 WHERE DO YOU BEGIN?

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You Begin by Getting Faculty and School Leaders To Develop a New Vision for Their High School

The first step for superintendents, principals, and vocational leaders who want to know "where to begin" is to introduce the whole faculty to a vision of the things your school can do to raise the achievement of career-bound students. The vision consists of improved school practices and greater student success. You cannot change student outcomes unless you change school practices. Assure the faculty that your school can make the necessary changes **with the current staff, students, resources, facilities, and equipment.**

MAKING THE VISION A REALITY

This framework for improvement changes what is taught, what is expected, and how "the other students" are taught. Properly implemented, it can change relationships between teachers and students; academic and vocational teachers; and school, home, and community.

Develop an Upgraded Academic Core and a Major for All Students—Ninety percent or more of students in a "high school that works" should complete an upgraded academic core and a major in an academic, vocational, or fine arts area. More specifically, career-bound students should complete:

- At least three math and three science credits, including four credits in courses with content equal to that of the college preparatory curriculum.
- Four years of English acceptable for entry into a four-year college or university.
- At least four credits in a vocational or academic major above the core.

Have High Expectations for All Students—The expectations for general and vocational students should be high in academic as well as vocational classes. All teachers should expect career-bound students to master complex academic and technical content and problems.

Provide Quality Vocational Studies—The vocational curriculum should reflect the standards and challenging tasks of the modern workplace. Today's workers must be able to communicate and to use math and science principles to solve problems and make decisions.

Provide High-Level Academic Studies—High schools that work for career-bound students replace remedial, basic, and general academic courses with hands-on math, science, and English courses that make learning real. A variety of strategies—such as applied learning and cooperative learning—is used to help students master difficult academic concepts.

Create Interdisciplinary Teams of Teachers—Teams of teachers can develop joint learning projects that require students to work together to set up a procedure or test an idea for solving a problem or completing a project. Academic and vocational teachers work together to "coach" students.

Provide Ongoing Guidance—Career-bound students need a plan for their high school years. Guidance counselors can involve parents and students in developing a four-year program of study that combines high-level academic content and quality vocational studies. A plan focuses students on the future and helps them see a connection between high school and what they will do after graduation.

To help you introduce the High Schools That Work *program to the faculty, a six-hour workshop plan is available from SREB. Someone in each state in the* High Schools That Work *program is being trained to conduct the workshop. For more information, contact SREB.*

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Give Extra Help and Time—Some students need extra help to meet higher standards. Encourage teachers to give time and assistance before and after school and on weekends as needed for students to catch up and keep up.

Engage Students as Active Learners—Career-bound students learn best by doing. Teachers can assign meaningful projects for students to complete in groups—projects that relate to the students' interests and abilities.

Keep Score to Improve Practice—Scorekeeping is not meant to penalize teachers or students. It gives teachers information on what works and what does not. Examining scores and reports helps teachers and school leaders improve the quality of their graduates. Data can change relationships among academic and vocational faculty, students, parents, and community.

ADOPT OUTCOME GOALS

Management specialist W. Edwards Deming emphasizes that all members of an organization must share a clear sense of purpose over a period of time to improve products and services. The purpose of *High Schools That Work* sites is to produce high school graduates who can continue to learn at work and in further formal study. The goal of the *High Schools That Work* program is to improve the math, science, communication, problem-solving, and technical skills of career-bound students. The intent is to close dramatically—by at least one-third—the achievement gap between students pursuing a vocational major and those completing a college preparatory program of study. Schools should also consider setting as their goal—or purpose—to have 90 percent of students finish high school and to provide them with an accelerated and meaningful program of study.

DEMONSTRATE THE NEED FOR CHANGE

It is hard for teachers to begin to move toward a vision for change unless they know where the school and its students are now. A committee of teachers can compile information to inspire the faculty to write an action plan for change. Literature reviews and meetings with local employers will document the shortcomings of recent high school graduates. Standardized test data and teacher assessments will determine what percent of career-bound students can solve multi-step math and other complex problems, can communicate orally and in writing, can understand and apply the scientific process, and have a science and knowledge base for their vocational field of study.

Data are available on the courses career-bound students take. At a minimum, teachers and administrators need to know:

- What percent of career-bound students from the current senior class will graduate with at least four credits in a vocational major? What percent will graduate with at least three years of math and three years of science, including four credits in college preparatory level courses?
- What percent of these students complete at least an hour of homework daily?
- What percent of students read at least one book as an out-of-class assignment during their senior year? What percent writes a major research paper?

Look at Other Schools—Gathering and sharing information will help teachers build confidence to alter the way they prepare career-bound students. Schools that have successfully accelerated learning for "the other students" are a good source of information. Review the literature on effective high schools, and ask the leaders of those schools how they did it. Teams of teachers often visit other *High Schools That Work* sites to collect ideas and successful practices.

Confront Barriers to Change—Committees of teachers, administrators, parents, representatives of postsecondary education, and employers can develop solutions to key problems as you reconstruct the programs of study and instructional techniques available to career-bound students. For example, one committee can address how to get all students to make an effort to master complicated tasks. It can also identify what changes are needed in vocational courses and basic and general track academic courses so that they will be viewed as "high status" in the same way that college prep and "honors" courses are currently viewed by parents, students, and teachers.

Another committee can find ways to organize interdisciplinary teams of academic and vocational teachers who will have students in common, share common planning time, and work together to help students excel. A third committee can examine how to end the "general" track by requiring students to complete either college prep or tech prep, which the *High Schools That Work* program defines as an accelerated academic core with a vocational, academic, or fine arts major.

ENLIST PARENT SUPPORT

Parental involvement is essential to improve student learning. Parents of career-bound students must understand that their sons and daughters must pursue an accelerated program of high school study to have a quality of life equal to theirs. A committee composed of counselors and community leaders needs to grapple with the problem of how to involve and educate parents of "the other students" about the need for a more challenging program of study. The high school needs to let parents know that the school alone cannot do this—that parents must accept part of the responsibility.

PROVIDE STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

The vision for *High Schools That Work* depends on what happens in the classroom. Teachers must be actively involved in discussions on how to change the high school and in professional development before and during the change. Staff development should be linked to the vision and be based on what teachers say they need.

Teachers need training in the following areas:

- Risk-taking, communication, and planning for "whole school" change.
- Strategies such as cooperative learning and applied learning.
- Curricula that they may not have used or watched others use.
- Ways to get students to complete joint learning projects involving one or more academic and vocational teachers.
- Problem-solving techniques for teams of teachers to use in improving school practices.

CHANGE HAPPENS ONE STEP AT A TIME

Change does not happen all at once. Most *High Schools That Work* sites proceed slowly—in phases—to allow teachers, students, and parents to adjust.

The process often starts with a core group of academic and vocational teachers agreeing to try a few new practices. One way to begin is with a teacher inservice activity on how to get students to read for learning. Another way is for an English teacher and a vocational teacher to assign a major research paper that both teachers grade after guiding the students jointly toward completion.

There is no "right" way to begin—and no timetable for implementing the *High Schools That Work* program's key practices. Any school's plans must be flexible enough to respond to situations, overcome problems, and take advantage of opportunities.

DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

Administrators and teachers need to think systematically about their high school and develop an action plan to achieve the new vision. An *incremental planning process* helps develop and monitor an action plan. The process calls for continuous improvement, including:

- Know where you are in terms of your goals (assess).
- Develop a plan for reaching your goal (plan).
- Support your staff in making changes (do).
- Assess your progress in terms of desired goals (evaluate).

The challenge in developing an action plan is to recognize that "pain goes with change," to empower and support people to make the change—and to get out of the way as they carry out the plan.

ADOPT A PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGY

Committees charged with developing and implementing an action plan will encounter problems. If committees get proper support, they can build a foundation for a new kind of high school.

1. Recognize that there is a problem, and start asking questions—What is wrong? Why? With whom? Address the cause of the problem—not its effects.
2. Determine the extent of the problem. Gather detailed information—including quantitative and qualitative data—that will tell where you are, compared to where you want to be.
3. Determine the most important goals and activities to solve the problem.
4. Decide what will prevent you from reaching your goals.
5. Assemble data to make a wise decision, and identify the best action to solve the problem.

6. Assign tasks, make someone responsible, and decide when to take action.

7. Monitor your actions, revise tasks as needed, and periodically ask, "Did we solve the problem?"

RETHINK ALL ROUTINES

The *High Schools That Work* vision requires administrators and teachers to rethink school routines. Examine policies and routines that 1) exclude some students from the opportunity to learn challenging content; 2) communicate reduced expectations for some students; 3) provide some students with a program of study that they cannot connect to the future; 4) fail to help students connect academic and vocational studies; 5) fail to get all students to make the effort to master complex tasks; and 6) undermine a sense of belonging by some students.

Instead of isolating career-bound students in low-level academic courses, make every effort to enroll them in college prep level courses taught through an applied process or into new courses designed to teach equivalent content using non-traditional instructional methods. Prepare for the support, extra help, and extended time some students need to meet higher standards.

DISTRICT AND STATE SUPPORT

Teachers and school leaders who undertake to achieve the vision of *High Schools That Work* need to know that they have long-term backing from the district and state. They need supportive local and state policies and vital technical assistance and staff development.

CONCLUSION

Successful efforts to give career-bound students a high-status curriculum depend on a school environment in which all students attempt to master complex academic and technical skills. The line between academic and vocational studies must blur. Instruction must enable students to master complex tasks by engaging them in hands-on activities that make abstract learning visible. Parents, teachers, employers, and leaders of postsecondary education must be actively involved in designing a "high school that works."

For more information, contact Gene Bottoms, Director, *High Schools That Work*, (404) 875-9211.

The High Schools That Work *program is the nation's largest and fastest growing effort to raise the achievement of career-bound students. Sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board-State Vocational Education Consortium, the program includes school and school system sites in 19 states.* High Schools That Work *is supported in part by a grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.*

These guidelines are based on the Consortium's experience with High Schools That Work *sites during the first five years of the program. The guidelines are designed to be a framework for positive action at the school site and in the classroom.*

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